

Evgeny Sveshnikov

Sveshnikov vs. the Anti-Sicilians

A Complete Repertoire for Black

New In Chess 2014

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Foreword

My story begins long ago. In 1977, I played Mikhail Tal in the USSR Championship. In reply to 1.e4, the eighth World Champion often played the Sicilian Defence, but against me, he usually chose another opening, because he did not want to meet the move 2.c3. On this occasion, he chose 1...c6, and we soon reached a roughly equal position: symmetrical, but with White having an extra tempo. I offered a draw, but to my great surprise, Tal refused. In the end, I lost the game and after it finished, I asked him:

– Misha, were you really not playing for a draw? After all, you played the Caro-Kann, and got a symmetrical position...

And Tal replied:

– I play the Sicilian when I want a draw, and the Caro-Kann when I want to win!

I remember that I thought about this: we have studied the Sicilian so deeply that it has become hard for Black to play it for a win!

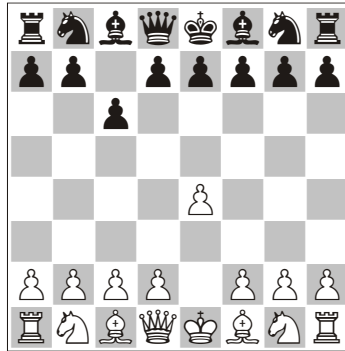
A lot of time has passed since then, and what we regarded as ‘deep’ has now become a matter of common knowledge. Tal’s method has been taken up not only by grandmasters and masters, but also even by amateurs – with the help of the Sicilian, one can obtain decent play against any opponent, assuming, of course, that you are well acquainted with the subtleties of this opening.

In my lectures and articles, I have already pointed out that in the Sicilian, the main battle revolves around the squares d4 and e5. From this point of view, the moves 2.c3 and 2.f4 are very important; it is not by chance that I have devoted my two previous monographs to these moves, books which, I am pleased to say, have been very well received, both by professionals and amateurs. Undoubtedly, the main move against the Sicilian is 2.♟f3, and in this new book, we will already start to examine it, although on the way, there are also such other moves as 2.c4, 2.d4, 2.g3, 2.♟c3 and several others. We have no right to skip these, since if you wish to play the Sicilian Defence, as Black, you will meet these so-called ‘sidelines’ regularly in your practice.

To quote my own experience, I almost always answer 1.e4 with 1...c5, and the move 2.♟f3 is chosen against me in less than half of my games. So I would like to dispel immediately the illusion that the sidelines are unimportant and rarely seen. Opponents avoid the main lines out of practical considerations, so as to take me out of theory. But disappointment awaits them, as they merely run into other, equally well-prepared lines. There are no ‘greenfield sites’ in the Sicilian – everything has been studied and analysed. For me personally, the most unpleasant thing is when the opponent plays 5 or 10 moves of a main line, and then comes up with something new. But when their ‘creativity’ starts after 2-3 moves, then I just clap my hands in glee! It may seem that one can play 2.a3 or 2.♟a3, so as to avoid theory. But after reading this book, you will know what to do after such moves also. In this

new work, I want to share with my readers my knowledge and experience, in this direction, in the sidelines, rather than the main variations.

So, which variations will be considered in this book? Once again, I would emphasise that I will study them mainly from Black's side, and will show how he can get good play in each case. We will list White's options, 'from left to right', as it were:



A) **2.a3?**. An artificial move, after which Black can justifiably think about fighting for the initiative.

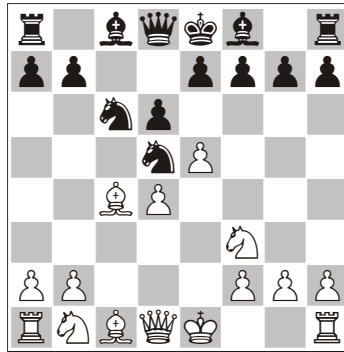
B) **2.♘a3?!**. A dubious move, which has been played several times at top level by grandmaster Vadim Zviagintsev.

C) **2.b4?!**. The so-called Wing Gambit. I think White does better to play first 2.♘f3 and see how Black reacts. Thus, after 2...d6, the gambit 3.b4!? is now perfectly correct. But on move 2, the sacrifice of the b-pawn is premature.

D) **2.b3**. After Kramnik's victories against Mikhail Kobalia (Tromsø 2013) and Ernesto Inarkiev (Nyzhny Novgorod 2013), this move has become quite popular. White can certainly play like this, but it is hard to count on an opening advantage. The flank development of the bishop gains significantly in strength, after the moves 2.♘f3 e6.

E) **2.c3**. This solid move is the second or third strongest after 2.♘f3. I myself have played this regularly since the mid-1970s and recently produced a substantial book on it. Of course, there is not much sense in repeating myself, but so the reader can get a complete repertoire against all White's ways of avoiding the main lines, in this book I present a relatively recent and quite good new continuation for Black.

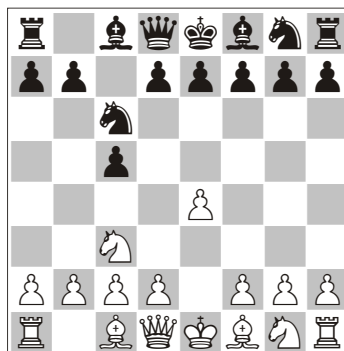
I suggest the most solid plan **2...♘f6!**, which gives Black equal play. Admittedly, he needs to know quite a lot, and I have no desire to copy out my earlier book, so I have limited myself to the most important games and variations. The critical position arises after **3.e5 ♘d5 4.d4 cxd4 5.♘f3 ♘c6 6.cxd4 d6 7.♙c4**.



In the earlier book, I analysed 7...♘b6!, which is the strongest move, requiring deep knowledge from both players. In this new work, I recommend the more forcing 7...dxe5!?, where Black also gradually equalises.

F) **2.c4**. This has been played against me several times by the Latvian grandmaster Normunds Miezis, and sometimes also arises via the English Opening, after 1.c4 c5 2.e4!?. It is a fairly ambitious plan – White hopes to obtain a space advantage and seize the initiative, thanks to this. However, it is not so simple to carry out the advance d2-d4 and if Black strengthens the square d4, he will have an excellent game.

G) **2.♘c3**. The Closed Sicilian was used, in particular, by the World Champions Vasily Smyslov and Boris Spassky. Here there is enormous practical experience and play can take on the most varied character. Black replies 2...♘c6, and now White has a wide choice.



G1) 3.♙b5; G2) 3.f4; G3) 3.g3; G4) 3.♘ge2! (as has been played by Bobby Fischer and Garry Kasparov); G5) 3.♘f3.

The amount of information here is very great, but we will not get tangled up in all the detail – I will try to limit my treatment to the plans and variations that are most necessary for Black to know.

H) **2.d3**. White wants to take play into a King's Indian Attack. I think this plan is more appropriate when Black has already put his pawn on e6, closing the c8-h3 diagonal for his bishop. Having said that, the King's Indian Attack is not the most dangerous set-up for Black to face and I have several times successfully carried out the plan of advancing the queenside pawns. But in this move-order, Black has an even stronger response, involving bringing his bishop out to g4.

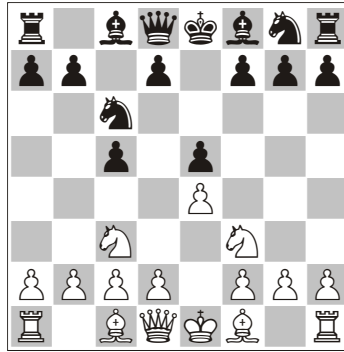
I) **2.d4**. The introduction to the Morra Gambit: 2...cxd4 3.c3!?, which has many adherents among amateur players. However, Black is not obliged to accept, and after 3...d5 4.exd5 ♖xd5 5.cxd4 ♗f5!? play goes into the variation I recommend for Black against 2.c3. At the same time, the principled move 3...dxc3!? also deserves consideration, and we will also examine this. Although, to my mind, White's initiative almost compensates for the pawn minus, and in order to obtain winning chances, Black must work hard, withstanding his opponent's pressure for a long time, and choosing only the best moves. Here, general considerations alone are insufficient for Black, who needs deep knowledge of forcing variations.

J) **2.f4**. I recently wrote a book on this interesting variation, known in English as the Grand Prix Attack. But the name is not the point – the system is very interesting and also less explored compared to many variations of the Sicilian. I suggest that Black plays 2...d5 3.exd5 ♘f6! 4.♗b5+ ♘bd7!? – the last move leads to sharper positions than 4...♗d7. In this book, as well as 5.c4, we will also study the quite new plan beginning with 5.♘f3!?, which was recently worked out and tested successfully in several friendly games against top grandmasters, by the organiser of the Zurich Chess Challenge, Oleg Skvortsov.

K) **2.g3?!**. I managed to put this continuation under a cloud in the early 1990s and since then, it has been played fairly rarely. But one definitely needs to know the precise response, otherwise Black can face difficulties.

L) **2.♘e2!?**. A cunning move: White wants to see his opponent's reaction, so as then to choose either 3.d4, or a closed set-up, depending on what Black plays. I suggest the reply **2...♘f6!**, forcing **3.♘c3** (if 3.d3, then 3...d5!). Then **3...e5!**, and White does not manage to seize the square d5, and only has the plans with 4.♘g3 or 4.g3.

M) **2.♘f3!**. The strongest move, to which I plan to devote two more books: one to the variation 2...♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 e5!, the other to the Rossolimo System 2...♘c6 3.♗b5! (I consider this the strongest move for White). But the present work is devoted to White's methods of avoiding these main lines, and so here we will only examine the variation 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♘c3, after which I recommend the reply 3...e5!.



Some of these continuations deserve more attention than others, and we will discuss each in turn.

To end this Foreword, I should like to thank International Master Vladimir Barsky for his help in working on this book.

Evgeny Sveshnikov
Riga, October 2014

Chapter 1

The Opening as the Key to Everything

Several years ago, I wrote a long polemical article in the Russian journal '64 – The Chess Observer', in which I debated various points with the leading trainer, Mark Dvoretsky. The main one was the role of the opening in the game of chess. For this book, I have reworked my earlier piece and somewhat shortened it, but I remain to this day prepared to sign up to all of my earlier conclusions.

The most important 'five points'

In one of his books, Mark Dvoretsky identified four factors, which determine the strength and potential of every chess player:

- 1) natural talent;
- 2) health and reserves of energy;
- 3) determination, willpower and sporting qualities;
- 4) special chess preparation.

In April 2002, during the Russian junior championships in Sochi, I had a long discussion with Mark: we spent two hours, wandering around the residential complex at Dagomys and discussing chess. I told him that he had left the fifth and most important factor out of his list:

- 5) a love of chess!

It is this fifth factor that reveals the other four!

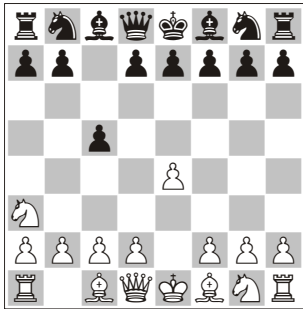
Mark replied that he had taken his list from Botvinnik, and that he agreed with me overall, but in his subsequent publications, he has not said a word about this. I wish to correct both Botvinnik and Dvoretsky, and I think chess lovers will value my correction. Usually, when speaking with trainers and pupils, I say to them that if a player does not greatly love chess, then he should avoid the path of a professional chess player and remain an amateur!

A rule without exceptions

Chess is many-sided and in this lies its beauty: everyone can find his own thing in it. Unfortunately, these days it is only points which are valued, whilst the beauty in solving mathematical puzzles does not bring any dividends. It is certainly a pity, as chess has known better times. Most strong players regard beauty as the exception to the rule, and for the first half of their lives, value the fight most highly of all. But once they start working with children, they see something else – mathematical logic, and they start to value as the highest thing the search for the best move (even in analysis in preparation for a game). The most valuable thing to me is the search for rules to which there are no exceptions. This is what I regard as the summit of creativity!

I would like to look at one opening position, which has been examined by our esteemed trainer, and to dispute his conclusion about the opening: ‘Possibilities for creativity exist at the very start of the game’. Thus:

1.e4 c5 2.♘a3?



I am not sure that Vadim Zviagintsev was the inventor of this move, but it is certainly true that people only started taking it seriously after the Russian Championship in 2005. Maybe this move will be associated with Zviagintsev’s name, in chess history?

Overall, Mark Israelevich is fairly loyal towards the move 2.♘a3. Now I, not such an esteemed trainer as him, but a pretty well-known theoretician, will permit myself to offer my opinion.

I spent a long time thinking over how I should punctuate this move: ‘?!’ or ‘?’, but decided in the end not to prevaricate, and so the mark given is, of course, ‘?’... I once played on the same team as Tanya Voronova, an IM and well-known trainer in Latvia and elsewhere. She had seen Dvoretzky’s article in *64* and advised her friend, a grandmaster, to play 2.♘a3 in a tournament game – so great is the influence of Mark Dvoretzky, even on grandmasters and professional trainers. And then I understood that I could not keep silent!

So, let us first of all try to assess the move 2.♘a3, and identify its strong and

weak points. For this, I will use my own system of opening principles.

A) Control of the centre: There is none; furthermore, the knight may later have difficulty contributing to the battle for the centre.

B) Developing the pieces: one can hardly describe the knight’s development to the edge of the board as aggressive or even good.

C) Safety: The move 2.♘a3 disturbs the safety of the pawn on e4, which can no longer be defended by the knight with ♘c3.

D) Creating and attacking weaknesses. This is the only point, where White is more or less OK. The point is that after 1...c5, White’s pieces get the convenient square c4 and there the knight is aiming in the next few moves. But all the same, this principle is only the fourth in importance, and from the point of view of the first three principles, the move 2.♘a3 is simply bad. As a minimum, White has 6-7 better moves, plus 2-3 of similar strength and another 6-7 which are definitely bad.

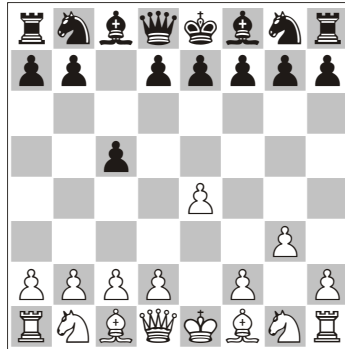
The only thing one can say for the move is its surprise value, which can be useful against an opponent who has a poor grasp of the subtleties of the opening. I hope that after my present piece, even this merit of the move 2.♘a3? will disappear.

So, how should Black best react?

One can follow the general chess rule, that a flank action should be met by a counter in the centre, or one can recall Réti’s words, that ‘The opening, in principle, is the battle for the centre’.

Chapter 6

1.e4 c5 2.g3



By economising on the tempo ♞b1-c3 , White hopes to obtain a favourable version of the King's Indian Attack. For the moment, he does not commit his queen's knight, and later has the option of developing it not only to c3, but also to d2, when the valuable central square d4 can be guarded by the move c2-c3.

Even so, the move 2.g3?! does not permit White to count on an opening advantage, but in order to demonstrate this, Black has to go in for the principled variation: 2...d5! 3.exd5 ♖xd5 4.♞f3 (after 4.♞f3, there is the very unpleasant reply 4...♞e6+ 5.♞e3 ♝c6) 4...♞g4! (Filipenko's plan 4...♞e6+!? is also interesting; Black draws the enemy bishop to e2, and his own light-squared bishop then comes to b7) 5.♞g2 ♞e6+ 6.♞f1 ♝c6. This is how my games against the English GMs Nigel Short and Danny King developed, and in both, I succeeded in equalising quickly.

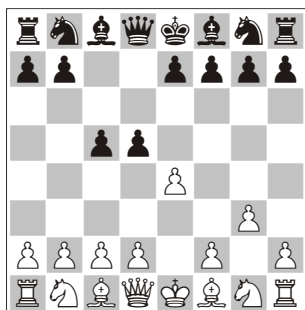
But before going over to this variation, I spent a long time trying other systems; in addition, I played the position as White a number of times. And I came to the conclusion that if Black refrains from 2...d5, then he has definite problems.

Game 14

Alexey Suetin
Evgeny Sveshnikov
 Dubna 1979

Grandmaster Alexey Stepanovich Suetin was considered a great specialist in the opening. And, certainly, in this game, he succeeded in causing Black definite problems.

1.e4 c5 2.g3 d5



3.exd5

The most natural and principled continuation. After **3.♙g2 dxe4 4.♙xe4** (better is **4.♘c3**) **4...♗f6 5.♙g2 ♘c6** (**5...e5!**?) Black quickly completes his development and seizes the initiative: **6.d3 ♙g4** (**6...c4!**?) **7.f3 ♙f5 8.♙e3 e5 9.♗e2 ♙e7 10.♗bc3 0-0 11.0-0 ♖d7 12.♗e4 ♗d5 13.♙f2 b6 14.♗2c3 ♗c7! 15.♖e1 ♙e6 16.♗d2 f5** with the better chances, Smirnov-Sveshnikov, Riga 1998 (rapid).

White sometimes plays **3.d3**, after which Black has a pleasant choice. First of all, I consider that the endgame after **3...dxe4 4.dxe4 ♖xd1+ 5.♗xd1 ♗f6 6.♗c3 ♗c6** can pose problems only for White. In addition, Black can go into a King's Indian Attack: **3...♗f6 4.♗d2 e6 4...e5!?**, **4...♗c6. 5.♙g2 ♙e7 6.f4 0-0** Yet another solid line for Black is **6...dxe4 7.♗xe4 ♗xe4 8.♙xe4 0-0 9.♙g2**

♖c7 10.♗f3 ♙d7. 7.e5, and here I have several times successfully tried the plan **7...♗e8!?**. It makes more sense to discuss this in the chapter devoted to the variation **2.d3 d5 3.♗d2**, because with the move-order **2.g3 d5 3.d3**, Black, I repeat, can exchange on e4 and go into a favourable endgame.

3...♖xd5 4.♗f3

In reply to the cautious **4.♖f3** Black can choose between two promising continuations:

A) **4...♖e6+ 5.♗e2 ♙d7** With the unmistakable threat of **6...♙c6. 6.♖b3 ♖xb3 7.axb3 ♙c6 8.♖g1 ♗f6 9.♗ec3** Black is better after **9.♗bc3 ♗a6. 9...♗g4 10.h3 ♗e5 11.♙e2 g6 12.f4 ♗f3+ 13.♙xf3 ♙xf3 14.d4 cxd4 15.♗b5** with complicated play;

B) **4...♗f6 5.♖xd5** Better is **5.♙g2**, not losing a tempo. **5...♗xd5 6.♙g2 ♗b4! 7.♗a3 ♗8c6 8.♗e2 ♙f5 9.d3 0-0-0 10.♙e3 e5** with advantage to Black, Birgelis-Sveshnikov, Latvia 2010 (rapid).

4...♙g4

In my game against Katalymov (Daugavpils 1974), I brought the bishop out to f5 and fell into an inferior position: **4...♙f5?! 5.♗c3 ♖e6+ 6.♙e2 ♗c6 7.0-0 0-0-0 8.d3** etc.

The bishop move to g4, judging by the database, was first played by Jacques Mieses, in Round 9 of the Cambridge Springs tournament of 1904. Later, it was adopted by Petrosian, Taimanov and others.

5.♙g2 ♖e6+ 6.♗f1

White must give up castling rights, since in the endgame after **6.♖e2 ♖xe2+ 7.♗xe2 ♗c6** he has to go on the defensive immediately. For example: **8.c3 0-0-0 9.♖d1 (9.d3 e5) 9...e5** (even stronger is **9...f5!**) **10.h3 ♙h2**

11.g4 ♖g6 12.d3 h5!? (12...♗f6)
 13.♗h4?! ♕xd3+! 14.♖xd3 ♖xd3
 15.♗xd3 hxg4 16.♗f5 gxh3, with the
 better chances for Black, Tartakower-
 Frydman, Warsaw 1935.

6...♗c6 7.h3 ♕h5 8.d3 ♖d7



9.g4

Probably the correct plan: for the moment, White does not determine the position of his queen's knight, and exchanges his other knight for the bishop. The move 9.d3 usually leads to a transposition, since it is hard for White to complete his development without playing the move g3-g4.

9...♕g6 10.♕e3 e6 11.♗h4



11...♕e7

It was worth considering 11...♗f6 12.♗xg6 hxg6 13.♗c3 0-0-0!, with chances for both sides.

**12.♗xg6 hxg6 13.♗c3 ♗f6
 14.♗e4 b6**

He should have played 14...♗xe4!?, and after 15.dxe4 ♖c7 or 15.♕xe4 0-0-0, Black is even slightly better.

15.♗xf6+ ♕xf6 16.c3 0-0

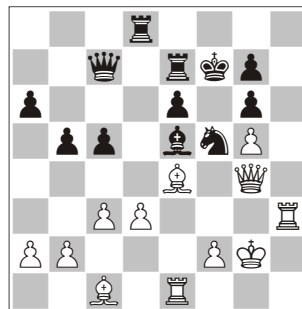
Black should not hurry to castle king-side. A roughly equal game results from 16...♖d8, whilst the more aggressive 16...0-0-0!?, with mutual chances, is also worth considering.

17.g5 ♕e5 18.h4



White's position looks very attractive, but breaking through Black's defences is not simple. Black just needs to transfer his knight to f5, where it will be posted very well.

**18...♖ad8 19.♖e2 ♗e7 20.♖d1
 ♖c7 21.h5 ♗f5 22.♖g4 ♖d7
 23.♕e4 ♖fd8 24.hxg6 fxg6
 25.♖h3 b5 26.♗g2 a6 27.♕c1
 ♗f7 28.♖e1 ♖e7**



How should White break through to the enemy king? Suetin decides to open a second front on the queenside.

Conclusion

When I started writing this book, I must admit that I did not expect to have to give such deep and detailed coverage of practically all White's options, even rare lines. But things did not turn out as expected... A great many players, even elite grandmasters, World Champions and contenders for the crown have started seeking happiness in such systems. Such is the time in which we live.

Firstly, they cannot find an advantage for White in the variation **1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 e5!**.

Secondly, computer databases and playing programs make it relatively easy to carry out very deep, accurate, and practically mathematically exact research of new continuations, and to search for new ideas and mini-traps, all through the openings. As an example, we can cite the line played several times recently by Vladimir Kramnik: **1.e4 c5 2.b3**, or the game Nevednichy-Sveshnikov, Albena 2013: **1.e4 c5 2.♘c3 ♘c6 3.♙b5 ♘d4 4.♙c4 e6 5.♘ge2 ♘f6 6.0-0 d5? 7.exd5 exd5 8.♘xd5!**.

Consequently, work on this book took rather more time and required a much more accurate assessment of several opening variations. Even so, the general conclusion is as follows: my system for finding the best move in the opening, based on eight principles (four for White and four for Black) has once again proved its correctness. No new continuations, which do not accord with this system (I feel justified in calling it the 'Sveshnikov system'), can affect the general theory of openings. All such novelties have only practical effect or serve to confirm general theoretical conclusions.

In summarising the result from this book, I will try to predict the future course of developments in the theory of the Sicilian, over the near future.

The use of such variations as **2.a3?**, **2.b4?**, and **2.d4 cxd4 3.c3** will practically cease at all levels.

The move **2.g3** is a rare guest in tournament play and will remain so. Nor will the moves **2.c4** and **2.d3** increase their popularity.

But in recent times, there has been a sharp increase in interest from White in the lines **2.♘c3 ♘c6 3.♙b5** and **2.b3**. I think this is a temporary phenomenon and the popularity of these lines will in due course decline.

By contrast, the positions after **1.e4 c5 2.♘c3 ♘c6 3.♘f3 e5** and **3.♘ge2 e5** will be researched ever more deeply. The variation **2.♘c3 ♘c6 3.f4!?** also awaits further development, the principal reply for Black being **3...g6!**, when the weakening of the square d4 prevents White obtaining a real advantage.

Moves which are not the main lines will only be used by elite players against concrete opponents, based on practical considerations. Weaker players, when playing against stronger opponents, will use these offbeat moves in the hope of simplifying the position and/or making a draw.

But the main developments in the Sicilian Defence will come in two principal directions: